

AGAINST ALL ODDS



AROUND ALONE IN THE
BOC CHALLENGE

ALAN NEBAUER



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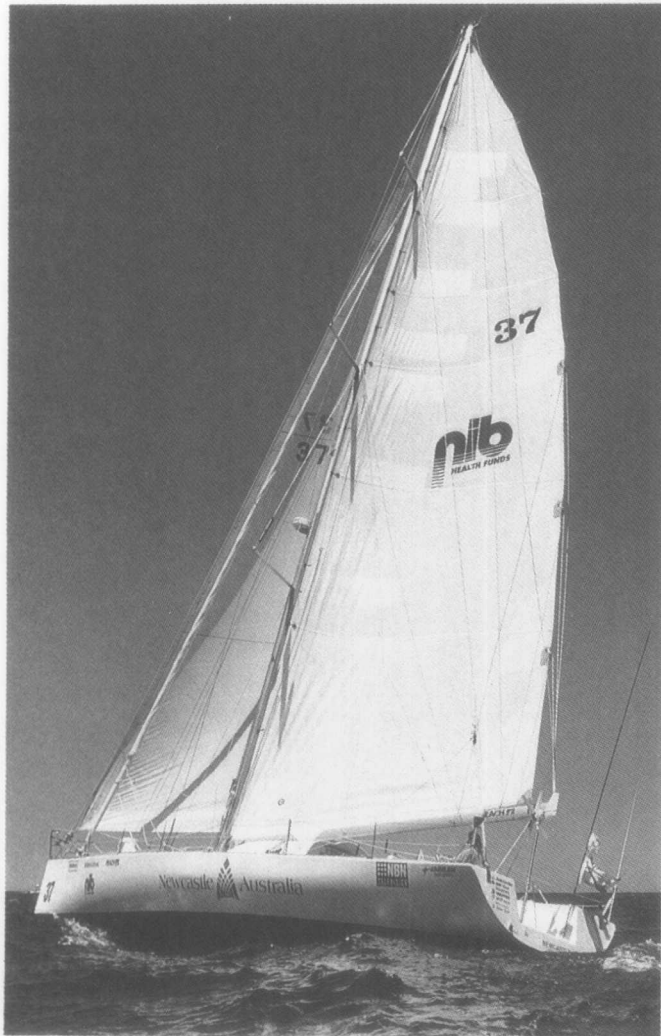
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For Cindy, Annie and Vance



Newcastle Australia
STEVE NEBAUER, A BEAR IMAGE

Foreword

EVERYONE has a dream. A small number of people pursue that dream and an even smaller number have the opportunity, resolve, dogged determination and personal attributes to turn the dream into reality. Alan Nebauer knew as a child that he was going to sail around the world alone. If anyone had told him then just how difficult realizing that dream would be, it would only have served to strengthen his desire and resolve.

The BOC Challenge is a 27 000 nautical mile single-handed sailing race around the world, which has been held every four years since 1982. It inspires all those who have ever contemplated a circumnavigation, be they old, young, male or female. It is a unique sporting event that enables, for example, a 70-year-old man aboard his 15-year-old 40 foot (12.2 m) yacht to compete with a 34-year-old man aboard his new 60 foot (18.2 m) yacht that has cost a million dollars to build. As the longest race on earth for an individual in any sport it is considered a race for sailors with talent and courage. There are two classes of boats. Class I consists of boats 50 to 60 feet (15.2 to 18.8 m) long. Class II consists of boats 40 to 50 feet (12.2 to 15.2 m) long. Since its inception, the boats have evolved into purpose-built machines designed only to sail fast across the world's oceans.

By their very nature, solo skippers are strong-willed individuals, all with very different reasons for pursuing such a challenging vocation. Some are natural-born sailors who regard events such as the BOC Challenge as a natural progression in a lifetime on the water. Others are committed adventurers for whom the call of the sea is a glistening lure. There are the well-sponsored professionals whose huge water-borne steeds demand great skill and nerves of steel to sail, coupled with deep corporate pockets to campaign successfully, and there are the small-budget sailors whose boats

are run on a shoestring, having as many problems with their bank managers as they do with the weather.

For every one of them, sailing a yacht single-handed across oceans offers the ultimate avenue for their desire to be both mentally and physically stretched to new limits, to do something different in a world of increasing conformity and to appease an insatiable pioneering spirit. Each one makes great personal sacrifices to be on the start line, some having even sold their homes to keep their boat afloat.

Bonded by a common passion, the skippers in the BOC Challenge are inevitably brought closer still by the calms and storms, the triumphs and the tragedies that occur as the race unfolds. As Alan Nebauer describes, the disparate fleet of skippers that crosses the start line in Charleston, South Carolina, returns over eight months later as a close-knit family.

A daily inter-yacht radio hour provides, for the most part, the only regular contact with life outside your own yacht and, during the first weeks of the 1994–95 BOC Challenge, Alan Nebauer and myself formed a solid friendship. We had both put our projects together in the face of economic adversity with a lot of home-grown support as well as some corporate sponsorship, and we had both left young families ashore when we set off. It therefore seemed only right that Alan was the nearest help when my yacht hit a submerged object and started to sink in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean. Once aboard *Newcastle Australia*, the enormity of my misfortune weighed heavily, but three weeks with the ebullient Alan was the perfect tonic for my traumatic experience. His positive outlook and natural enthusiasm not only helped greatly to revitalize my own sailing ambitions, but later in the race were to see him through his own troubled waters.

Alan's completion of the BOC Challenge ranks as one of sport's greatest achievements. All the competitors faced gear failure and breakages of varying degrees—this is, after all, a race of attrition—but each leg of the race found *Newcastle Australia* beset with problems of such magnitude that many would have conceded defeat and retired. Not Alan Nebauer. A major keel problem, electrical failure and even a dismasting were not going to stop him rounding Cape Horn and his fortitude throughout was an inspiration to all. So much so that when he arrived in Punta del Este, Uruguay, with a broken rudder he found that fellow skippers and their shore crews were preparing to build him a replacement rudder that would keep him in the race.

Back home, his course was being plotted by a Newcastle population that had taken Alan to their hearts. They listened in awe to the regular ship-to-shore interviews as he recounted rescuing myself, sailing with a

jury-rigged mast and then steering with a makeshift steering system. Back at race headquarters, where I ended up working, we were equally impressed with Alan's astonishing feats of seamanship.

Alan had one of the toughest passages imaginable in what is a very tough race but at the end of it he was already talking about another project and competing in another BOC Challenge. This not only proves that we sailors are blessed with selective memories but is a testimony to his strength of character and his commitment to the task.

Although we grew up half a world apart, our love of sailing and adventure brought us together in the BOC Challenge. I hope I have the privilege of racing against him again soon. Or, if he needs a first mate before that, I'll be first in line.

JOSH HALL

Gartmore Investment Managers

Preface

To be truly challenging a voyage, like life, must rest on a firm foundation of financial unrest. Otherwise you are doomed to a routine traverse.

Sterling Hayden, *Wanderer*, Futura, London, 1979, p. 22

I HAVE never been one for routine. I had sailed over 50 000 nautical miles prior to the BOC Challenge safely and with very few dramas, mostly with my wife Cindy as companion and crew. However, my voyage in the BOC Challenge was definitely no routine traverse. Many times during the race I wished for some routine—to be sailing fast with not a care in the world—but often this was not to be the case.

To write a book about my experiences in the BOC Challenge surprises no-one more than me. However, I was initially motivated to consider doing so by Mark Schrader, BOC race veteran and race director. Since then, many people have asked me when I am writing my story.

This book is not intended to be a complete overview of the 1994–95 BOC Challenge, nor a manual of how to do it. It is simply an account of my participation in the race and I hope that you will get a glimpse of the different facets involved in such a competition and, perhaps, glean some useful information relating to voyaging in general.

To be able to take part in the BOC Challenge is, for me, a personal achievement and the realization of a long-held goal. In all honesty, however, and I think it will become obvious as you read my account, my achievement is not one I could have made on my own. Yes, I was at sea for over eight months by myself but this was possible only because countless people believed in me and helped me to achieve my goal. This help came in the form of both monetary support, through our sponsors and supporters, and

community support as friends and family contributed much in the way of time and enthusiasm for the project.

The three years of fundraising and campaigning were, in a way, much more difficult to achieve than the actual race was, though no less challenging and exciting. Cindy and I had to enter a world unfamiliar to both of us and far removed from our sailing lifestyle. We would need almost half a million dollars. With all our combined efforts we were only able to raise slightly more than half that amount. The rest we had to make up with loans and deferred payments.

At times during the campaigning, as in the actual race, it would have been reasonable to bow out gracefully for any number of reasons. However, as with anything worthwhile, there must be commitment and once we had said publicly to some of our yachting friends while cruising the west coast of Mexico in 1990 that my intention was to compete in the BOC Challenge, there was no turning back. We knew it would be hard but we had no idea of how hard it really would be.

There were many lessons to be learnt, both on and off the water. Although I am not totally satisfied with my overall place in the race, given the delays and unforeseen situations that came my way, there is much satisfaction in having completed the course.

I must extend my thanks to many people and I apologize for any omissions. I am privileged to have had the trust and support of many sponsors and supporters (see pages xv to xvii). Also, my parents, Ron and Shirley Nebauer, and family have encouraged my exploits since I was a small boy learning to sail on an inland lake. And to Cindy's parents, Max and Janiece Smith, who have always been enthusiastic about our decisions, even though they have probably lost a lot of sleep since I married their daughter and took her away to sea in early 1987.

Finally, to my wife Cindy, who has given me incredible support throughout the whole enterprise. She was the first to believe and encourage me to pursue my ambition and, frankly, it would not have been possible without her determined and wholehearted efforts that continued, without complaint, during the many occasions when our family lacked the freedom and security that comes with a regular 'nine-to-five' lifestyle.

It says in the Bible that 'where there is no dream the people perish'. I thank God for giving me the dream and for enabling me to pursue it.

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I WOULD like to thank the following sponsors and supporters of *Newcastle Australia* who, with their help, made it possible for me to compete in the 1994-95 BOC Challenge.

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Sail areas		
	sq.ft	m ²
mainsail:	925	(86)
no. 1 genoa:	1013	(94.2)
blade jib:	432	(40)
storm jib:	97	(9)
no. 1 spinnaker:	2700	(252)
no. 2 spinnaker:	2200	(204)
trysail:	193	(18)

Other areas	
length:	50 ft (15.2 m)
beam:	14 ft (4.2 m)
draft:	12 ft (3.6 m)
displacement:	13 000 lbs (6000 kg)



▲ *Sail plan of Newcastle Australia*

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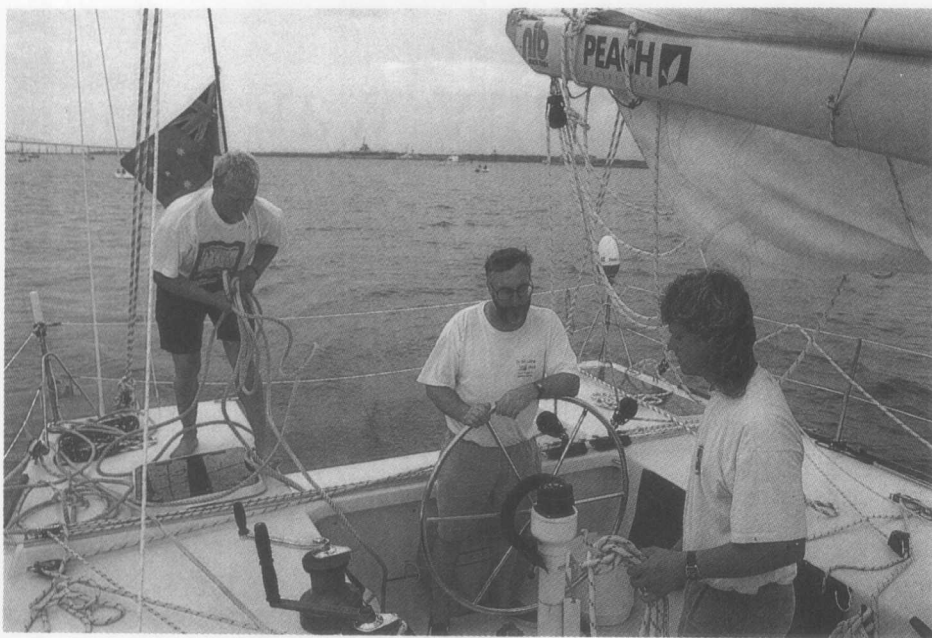
On my way



THERE was 30 minutes before the starting gun of the fourth BOC Challenge and it was time to say goodbye to my shore crew—my wife, Cindy, my younger brother, Mick, and my mentor and boatbuilder, Kanga Birtles, who had been on board *Newcastle Australia* for the tow out to the race starting area. It was a race rule that competitors had to be alone on their vessels 20 minutes before the official start of the 27 000 nautical mile race.

Having released the line from the 23 foot (7 m) towboat, I radioed race control to say that Cindy, Mick and Kanga were ready to be picked up in one of the official high-powered inflatable dinghies. This left me with only a few precious moments with them. The farewells were emotional. I hugged and kissed Cindy. We had shared some incredible experiences since we were married in 1987 and it was going to be hard to leave Cindy and our two children, five-year-old Annie and three-year-old Vance, for so long. But this was their race too and we had chosen this course for our life. So few people have been able to take part in this race that we felt we were indeed a privileged couple.

I hugged Mick and thanked him for his help. Mick had spent the past twelve months in Europe and had travelled to Charleston from Crete to help prepare the boat for the race. I felt like hugging Kanga but instead I grabbed his hand in a firm shake in an effort to communicate how much I appreciated his help and encouragement over the past few years. I wanted him to know how much his efforts had helped me to make it to Charleston. At the same time I was trying to absorb his last-minute pep talk. Kanga was as cool as ever—after all this was only a boat race—‘I should get out there and give them heaps’.



▲ Mick Nebauer, Kanga Birtles and myself on our way out to the start line

I was now alone and milling about in the blustery south-westerly breeze with a reefed mainsail, getting a feel for the conditions and positioning *Newcastle Australia* for a reasonable place on the start line. I was as nervous as a cat.

Twenty competitors' vessels and several hundred spectator craft waited off the entrance to Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. The start line was marked at one end by a US Coast Guard cutter and at the other by a US Navy warship. Their size added to the drama of the pre-race maneuvers as the fleet jockeyed for position amid the many varied spectator vessels. It was 17 September 1994.

Now so close to the start, there was no time for emotion or nerves. I took hold of the wheel and my tension evaporated. This is what I had come for. I told myself not to worry about getting a textbook start but to go for clean air and room to maneuver. The last thing I wanted to happen, just for the sake of a few seconds, was a collision with another competitor or with an over-enthusiastic spectator boat—I had a long way to go.

Waiting for the 10-minute gun and trying not to crowd any of my rivals, I picked my spot and sailed out to the windward end of the line. Sailing back, I maintained boat speed to time my arrival at the line seconds after the gun sounded—the gun that was to send nineteen men and one woman

heading around the world. Each was as serious as the others, each was there for different reasons—some to win, some just to get around, some with every chance of winning and some with slim chance of getting around. Where did I fit in? Where would I end up? I was determined simply to do my best.

The gun sounded and I felt a rush of adrenalin. The race had begun. I felt great excitement to be embarking on what had been a dream since I was a small boy—to sail solo around the world, a journey of over 27 000 miles. From the start I flashed past *Protect Our Sea Life*, a South African vessel and one of the smallest in the race. I then rapidly overtook Simone, a young Italian sailing the 50 foot (15.2 m) *Town of Cervia, Adriatic Sea*. This was wonderful. Then Jean Luc Van den Heede tore past me in his sleek red 60 foot (18.2 m) *Vendée Enterprises*. This was Jean Luc's fourth solo circumnavigation since 1986 and I wondered how he felt. I had long admired him and his exploits. It was great to be sailing alongside him.

▶
Newcastle Australia off to
a good start
CHRISTOPHER AMER

